

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-10 ISO-00 SSO-00 INRE-00

NSCE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

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OMB-01 ACDA-05 SY-05 SCS-03 SCA-01 EB-07 FAA-00

DOT-00 A-01 OPR-02 OC-05 CCO-00 SAM-01 AID-05 /117 W

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O R 231700Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 4878

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION NATO

USMISSION USUN NY

USCINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

FOSIF ROTA

COMSIXTHFLT

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 2653

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PBOR MMOL MOPS MR MO SS SP

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: MAURITANIAN DEVELOPMENTS

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 2626

1. BANNER HEADLINE IN GOVERNMENT-RUN DAILY NEWSPAPER
DECEMBER 23 PROCLAIMS (AND SPANISH EMBOFF CONFIRMS)

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THAT MAURITANIAN ARMED FORCES ASSUMED CONTROL

DECEMBER 20 OF SPANISH SAHARAN VILLAGE OF TICHLA SITUATED ROUGHLY 45 KILOMETERS NORTH OF MAURITANIAN BORDER AND ABOUT 250 KILOMETERS INLAND (2136 N 1502.5 E). LACK OF CASUALTIES FLOWING INTO NOUAKCHOTT SUGGESTS MAURITANIANS ENCOUNTERED MINIMAL RESISTANCE IN THIS MANOUVER. CHAAB NEWS STORY STRESSES THAT "PROGRESSION (NORTHWARD) CONTINUES".

2. IN RELATED DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NORTH, SPANISH EMBOFF INFORMED US THAT TWO SPANISH PRISONERS CAPTURED BY MAURITANIANS IN LA GUERA HAVE BEEN RELEASED TO GOS REPS WHO IMMEDIATELY DESPATCHED THEM TO LAS PALMAS BY FISHING BOAT. NUMEROUS SOURCES REPORT LEVEL OF FIGHTING HAS DROPPED SHARPLY IN LAST 48 HOURS, AND THAT RAILROAD WHICH WAS ATTACKED SOME TEN DAYS AGO BY POLISARIO HAS BEEN REPAIRED AND IS NOW FUNCTIONING NORMALLY.

3. SECURITY IN AND AROUND NOUAKCHOTT REMAINS TIGHT, ALTHOUGH INTENSE ATMOSPHERE WHICH ACCOMPANIED MAURITANIAN MOVE IZO LA GUERA SEEMS TO HAVE SUBSIDED SOMEWHAT. MAURITANIAN SECURITY ELEMENTS CONTINUE TO WAGE INDUCTION CAMPAIGNS; ONE LONG-TIME RESIDENT OF NOUAKCHOTT REPORTS NEW RECRUITS ARE BEING OFFERED 18,000 UM (ABOUT \$420) AS ENLISTMENT BONUS. WITH MANY OF THEIR REGULAR LINE UNITS COMMITTED TO MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH, MAURITANIANS ARE RELYING ON COMBINATION OF NEW RECRUITS AND REINSTATED VETERANS TO ASSUME MANY ROUTINE SECURITY FUNCTIONS IN NOUAKCHOTT. POSSIBLY FOR FIRST TIME EVER MAURITANIAN ARMY UNITS ARE PROVIDING NEW RECRUITS WITH NIGHT TRAINING. AIRPORT AND PRINCIPAL GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS REMAIN HEAVILY GUARDED. WITH TWO F-27S TEMPORARILY COMMITTED TO TRANSPORTING PILGRIMS RETURNING FROM HOLY LAND, MAURITANIANS ARE RELYING ON ONE DC-3, ONE DC-4, AND TWO SKYVANS TO REINFORCE AND RESUPPLY MILITARY OPERATIONS INBCHE NORT.

4. SPANISH EMBOFF REPORTS ONLY HANDFUL OF SPANISH CITIZENS REMAIN IN EL AIUUN. VAST MAJORITY OF

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SPANISH RESIDENTS HAVE EITHER MOVED PERMANENTLY TO CANARY ISLANDS OR HAVE BEEN RELOCATED TEMPORARILY TO VILLA CISNEROS, A SMALL TOWN OF ROUGHLY 5,000, MOSTLY SPANIARDS, SITUATED ON THE COAST ABOUT 300 KILOMETERS NORTH OF MAURITANIAN BORDER. SPANISH MILITARY ATTACHE SAYS MAURITANIANS HAVE REQUESTED AND SPANISH HAVE AGREED TO WORK OUT ARRANGEMENT FOR TRANSFER OF POWER IN VILLA CISNEROS WHICH WILL

PERMIT MAURITANIAN ARMY UNITS TO OCCUPY TOWN AS
SPANISH PULL OUT.

5. COMMENT: (A) WE BELIEVE MAURITANIANS INTEND FOR
MOMENT TO PUSH THEIR FRONTIER/MILITARY PERIMETER
GRADUALLY NORTHWARD IN CAREFUL STEP-BY-STEP "REUNIFICA-
TION" OF SOUTHERN SAHARA REGION WITH MAURITANIA,
PAUSING WHENEVER THEY ENCOUNTER SIGNIFICANT
RESISTANCE. THIS LIMITED OBJECTIVE STRATEGY IS CON-
SISTENT BOTH WITH THEIR REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF THEIR
MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND THEIR TRADITIONAL
PREFERENCE FOR DISCUSSION, NEGOTIATION, AND COMPROMISE.
IN THIS FASHION, MAURITANIANS COULD AT MINIMUM GAIN
CONTROL OF KEY WATER WELLS IN AREA 50 TO 70 KILOMETERS
NORTH OF PRESENT FRONTIER, THUS GREATLY ENHANCING
THEIR ABILITY TO PROTECT ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT IRON
ORE RAILWAY WHICH RUNS ALONG OLD FRONTIER FROM IN-
CURSIONS BY POLISARIO SABOTAGE TEAMS.

(B) BUT EVEN STEP BY CAREFUL STEP REUNIFICATION
OF "MOTHER LAND" WILL NOT BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT A PRICE.
BESIDES OBVIOUS VULNERABILITY TO POLISARIO GUERILLA
ATTACKS ON DEPLOYED ARMY UNITS, MAURITANIAN SETTLEMENTS
THROUGHOUT NORTH, AND ESSENTIAL ITEMS OF INFRASTRUCTURE,
MAURITANIANS HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO PAY A SIGNIFICANT
PRICE FOR THEIR DECEMBER 6 DECISION TO PURSUE THEIR
SAHARA GOAL BY MILITARY AS WELL AS DIPLOMATIC/POLITICAL
MEANS. IN ADDITION TO DIRECT EXPENDITURES ON MILITARY
MOBILIZATION, ULTIMATE SAHARA PRICE MUST INCLUDE COSTS
INVOLVED IN SUSPENDING OR CANCELLING BROAD RANGE OF
DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, COST OF ADMINISTERING HUGE NEW AREA, AND
POSSIBLE PERMANENT SHIFT OF LIMITED RESOURCES FROM DEVELOPMENT
TO MAINTENANCE OF SIGNIFICANTLY EXPANDED MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT.
DEVELOPMENT EFFORT MAY SUSTAIN STILL FURTHER
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CUT IN FORM OF WITHDRAWAL OF ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE BY ALGERIA. ALGERIANS REPORTEDLY HAVE
ALREADY SENT MANY IF NOT ALL OF MAURITANIAN STUDENTS
BACK TO MAURITANIA, AND ALGERIAN EMBOFF REPORTS
GOA IS MAKING PLANS TO WITHDRAW ITS MEDICAL ASSISTANCE
TEAMS FROM SMALL TOWNS IN INTERIOR.

(C) UNLESS OF COURSE, INTENSE BEHIND-CLOSED-DOOR
MANEUVERING WHICH NOW APPEARS TO BE UNDERWAY SUCCEEDS
IN GLUEING TOGETHER SOME COMPROMISE FORMULA WHICH
WILL IN TRADITIONAL ARAB FASHION PERMIT ALGERIA AND
MOROCCO TO POSTPONE THEIR CONFRONTATION TO ANOTHER
PLACE AND ANOTHER TIME. MOROCCAN "PERSONALITY" (VARIOUSLY
REPORTED AS FOREIGN MINISTER LARAKI AND AMBASSADOR
TO MAURITANIA MAHJOUBI) SHOWED UP BRIEFLY IN NOUAKCHOTT
MORNING DECEMBER 20 JUST BEFORE IRAQI FOREIGN

MINISTER ARRIVED AND APPARENTLY AGAIN ON TWENTY SECOND. TWIN
JET EXECUTIVE AIRCRAFT WITH MOROCCAN ROYAL PALACE MARKINGS LANDED
MID-MORNING DECEMBER 22 AND WAS AGAIN AIRBORNE BY LATE AFTERNOON.
BOTH MAURITANIANS AND MOROCCAN CHARGE CATEGORICALLY REFUSED
TO DISCUSS PRESENCE OF AIRCRAFT, IDENTITY OF PASSENGER(S), OR
PURPOSE OF VISIT. QUERY: DID GUEDIRA FLY TO NOUAKCHOTT AFTER
HIS QUICK UNDER WRAPS VISIT TO ALGIERS? (SEE RABAT
6195) FINALLY, FOREIGN MINISTER MOUKNASS INFORMED
AMBASSADOR HE IS DEPARTING DECEMBER 24 FOR
TWO DAY VISIT TO TUNIS.HANDYSIDE

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